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ABSTRACT

This paper begins by outlining the boundaries and assumptions of contemporary psychology as determined by the current American Psychological Association "Criteria for Accreditation of Doctoral Training and Internship Programs in Professional Psychology." The research and activities which led to the establishment of a two-year M.A. psychology program that is therapeutically oriented, regards the humanities as fellow disciplines, and emphasizes the qualitative study of human experience are subsequently described. The existential-phenomenological foundation of the program is discussed and a one-year pilot study designed to examine the feasibility of a phenomenologically-based graduate psychology program with an interdisciplinary orientation is presented. The phenomenologically-based psychology is described as a systematic, dialectic, intersubjective and descriptive approach to the study of psychological events. Phenomenology is envisioned not as another psychology theory, but as a style of reflection coming between psychology and its habitual presuppositions. (Author/NRB)

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PHENOMENOLOGICALLY BASED THERAPEUTIC GRADUATE PROGRAM: A CONTRIBUTION TO PLURALISM IN PSYCHOLOGY

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PHENOMENOLOGICALLY BASED THERAPEUTIC GRADUATE PROGRAM: A CONTRIBUTION TO PLURALISM IN PSYCHOLOGY*

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Sigmund Koch has stated (eg. Koch, 1980; Wertheimer et.al., 1978) that the comprehensiveness and complexity of the subject matter of psychology, namely the whole person, precludes that psychology can be one coherent discipline. The reality of a wide diversity of approaches within psychology is generally recognized, whether it is viewed as a passing phase, deplored as fractionation, or embraced as evidence of growth and creativity.

This emphasis on diversity in psychology, however, has helped to obscure our awareness of certain assumptions, which most psychologists agree on, and which play a significant role in shaping the practice and institutional development of psychology. As one psychologist has expressed it, "Our present day gods are genes and quarks and schedules of reinforcement." (Corballis, 1980, p. 293). While the gods of psychology may not be quite this limited in number and scope, we believe that there are some significant gods who can barely gain entry into the temple of psychology through the back door. While our society may be pluralistic, psychology remains basically monolithic beneath its appearance of diversity. An analogy may help to show why it is difficult for us to recognize that in many ways psychology is monolithic. If one were to look at the Protestant faith, especially during the last thirty years, one would be hard pressed to recognize that the various denominations have anything fundamental in common. However, if one were to contrast the Protestant tradi-

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tion with one which is very different, say the Buddhist tradition, one starts to become clearer about the tenets and boundaries of Protestantism.

We are suggesting that psychology has been reluctant to depart from quantification and other characteristics adopted from the natural sciences, thereby limiting its contribution to the understanding of the person. Some psychologists even wonder if persons (as opposed to behaviors) can be studied scientifically at all, since they cannot be described in exact terms (eg, Fiske, 1979). Looking at the same basic problem in a positive vein, Sigmund Koch (Wertheimer et. al., 1978) has suggested that some areas of psychological study require modes of inquiry more like those of the humanities than of the sciences.

In this paper, we will (1) briefly point to the tacit boundaries and assumptions of contemporary psychology by focusing on the current American Psychological Association's "Criteria for Accreditation of Doctoral Training and Internship Programs in Professional Psychology" (American Psychological Association, 1979). (2) Then we will describe the activities which led to the establishment of a two year M.A. psychology program which is therapeutically oriented, where the humanities are regarded as fellow disciplines, and where the qualitative study of human experience is central. (3) Next, we will explain the philosophical foundation for this program.

Presupposition of Contemporary Psychology

The APA accreditation criteria (APA, 1979) are outlined in a paper which clearly addresses the importance of psychology's responsiveness to our pluralistic society. This document stresses that it is essential that doctoral programs have socially and personally diverse faculty and students (p. 4), and that a diversity of philosophies, goals, and practices be permitted from

program to program and from student to student.

However, this apparent endorsement of diversity must be understood within the context of the overall document. We are told that both the scientist-practitioner and the practitioner model of training involve a commitment to "comprehensive psychological sciences as the substratum and methodological root of any education or training in the field of psychology" (p. 2). The way psychologists elaborate on this commitment suggests that "science" means natural science (eg., Darley, 1973). The specific criteria for accreditation of doctoral programs strongly support this impression.

Required curriculum content of APA approved programs includes research design and methodology, statistics, and psychological measurement. Students must, in addition, show competence in substantive content areas, such as biological bases of behavior and cognitive-affective bases of behavior. The word behavior repeatedly occurs throughout this document. One would never guess that psychologists might also have some interest in human <u>experience</u>. In the discussion of related areas to which a student should have access, anthropology, sociology, and specific sciences are mentioned but there is no reference to the humanities, including philosophy. Examples of adequate facilities include such items as data analysis and computer facilities, laboratories, and provisions for scoring psychological tests. Students should be exposed to a variety of research methods, but the examples are from a quantitative/behavioral tradition. Sensitivity to individuals and understanding of various life styles are seen as important because of a concern for social justice as well as for the effective functioning of the psychologist in the community. This concern is commendable, but it is puzzling that understanding and sensitivity are not mentioned as being intrinsic to the discipline of psychology itself. In spite of all the discussion of diversity, a neopositivistic orientation is

apparently still what is required from a doctoral program seeking accreditation.

The Development of a Phenomenologically Based Program

We would now like to describe the development of our graduate program. Its development was made possible, first, by the nature of the institution. Seattle University is a relatively small Jesuit university with a strong commitment to an interdisciplinary, humanistic and reflectively oriented education and to service-oriented graduate programs. Second, the university has a number of faculty in psychology, philosophy, sociology, and other disciplines with a commitment to the qualitative study of the person. Third, the National Endowment for the Humanities (N.E.H.) funded a pilot study during 1979-80 to examine the feasibility of a phenomenologically based, graduate psychology program with an interdisciplinary orientation. During the pilot year we were able to gather sufficient data to convince the university that the program would be feasible as well as desireable. The data included the success of other phenomenologically based graduate programs, the positive response of scholars from across the United States and Canada, and surveys indicating strong interest in the program among undergraduate psychology seniors and juniors in the Pacific Northwest. Also, six pilot courses were developed and taught by five psychology, two philosophy and one sociology faculty, with one course team taught by a philosopher and a psychologist. The issues dealt with in these courses included the role of imagination in literature, psychology and transformation, implications of phenomenological philosophy for psychological research and practice, descriptive examination of positive psychological change in therapy and in everyday life, and an interpretive sociocultural-phenomenological perspective linking persons with society,

culture, and history. Students were involved in activities such as comparison of various approaches to therapy on the basis of concrete descriptions of active practice. They were introduced to the notion that attunement to the basic reality of human presence requires a certain attitude or mode of consciousness rather than training in specific listening and responding techniques.

We benefitted to a great extent from the advice and suggestions of thirteen distinguished consultants, six of whom made on-site visits. The remainder sent us reports on the basis of course outlines, student evaluations, and program proposals. Among the consultants were three philosophers, Hazel Barnes, Ed Casey, and Jacob Needleman, and ten psychologists and psychiatrists, including David Bakan, Joseph Lyons, Medard Boss, Amedeo Giorgi, and Ernest Keen. They were convinced the program would make a significant contribution to American psychology as well as to the relationship of the humanities and psychology. Many of them emphasized that they regarded the envisioned balance between reflective scholarship and practicum preparation for service as an essential and unique feature of this program.

At the present time, we are continuing to prepare for the beginning of the program in September, 1981. Our activities include contacting community agencies, selecting students and piloting courses.

Philosophical Foundations of Our M.A. Program

If psychology is pluralistic, if it is genuinely open to diversity, then it has to be open to philosophical ways of understanding the human that are alternatives to the narrow positivistic, deterministic, mechanistic model that has gripped psychology during most of this century. We began the planning and development of this program, which is a genuine alternative to traditional approaches, by founding it squarely on two presuppositions. One has to do

with the nature of the human situation. The other has to do with the nature of therapeutic intervention.

Let us first articulate our understanding of the psychological nature of the human person. In a word, the human person is ambiguous (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). It is clearly with great risk that we use this term (ambiguity) in a definition of the human. We risk not being given a fair hearing, from the start, because the scientific mode of consciousness abhors ambiguity. This abhorence was in the battle cry of the positivistic movement in philosophy upon which contemporary psychology rests. According to positivistic science, ambiguity only enters the psychologist's descriptions when he or she admits that there is inconclusive evidence. It is assumed that more research and more data will ultimately squeeze out any residual ambiguity. But we have borrowed from the existential-phenomenological philosophers the great insight that the very nature of the human is ambiguous.

The human is ambiguous in that it is both, at the same time, free and determined. In my reflection on my condition, I find that, on the one hand, I constitute my world (I make my world meaningful and I am responsible for these meaning making creative acts), and, on the other hand, I find my world already filled with meanings depositied by other people, the physical setting, my own genetically given abilities, and even my own moods. The existential philosopher's emphasis upon freedom does not imply that we are absolutely free. Absolute voluntarism is as untenable in reflection on experience as is absolute determinism. Sometimes Jean Paul Sartre leans toward this absolutizing of freedom. But we don't take him seriously when he is preaching this position.

This articulation of the fundamental nature of the human as ambiguous is not only a direct challenge to the positivistic position of determinism, it also challenges the philosophical position of dualism. This both/and nature

of ambiguity (both free and determined) is not a claim that we have spiritual minds that are free and physical bodies that are determined. The existential-phenomenological description of the human claims the unity of mental events and bodily events. It is an ambiguous unity, to be sure, but at our ontological base, we are a unity. We are embodied minds, if you will; or emminded-bodies. But we are not two entities. The Cartesian split is overcome in the existential-phenomenological vision.

How does one have a science, a psychology, when the beginning position claims ambiguity? Let me tell you how: You use the methods developed in the humanities that, from their beginning, recognized irony and paradox. Qualitative descriptions in literature, history, anthropology, philosophy, theology, and other humanities have deepened our understanding of the human condition. Their use of metaphor and analogy in place of literal and univocal thinking has captured the ambiguous nature of the human. The commitment to quantification and the experimental method that we find so established in psychology does not come from a motive to deepen our understanding of the psychological. Rather, it comes from the effort to model psychology after the natural sciences who describe physical events governed by the laws of nature. If we begin by recognizing that humans are not govered by laws of nature but are ambiguously free and determined, then the method of qualitative description is essential to the science of psychology.

From this fundamental presupposition of ambiguity concerning the nature of the human flows our second presupposition that therapeutic assessment and intervention is not to be modeled after a scientific research and technological engineering project. Our culture tends to be enamoured of technique. Let us focus a bit on the meaning of technique ir order to gain insights about methodology in psychology. William Barrett in his insightful book, The Illu-

sion of Technique (1979, p. 22), defines technique as:

> a standard method that can be taught. It is a recipe that can be fully conveyed from one person to another. A recipe always lays down a certain number of steps which, if followed to the letter, ought to lead invariably to the end desired. The logicians call this a decision procedure.

The use of a technique or recipe is squarely founded on the presupposition that each step taken by the technician causes a certain reaction that prepares the way for the next step. This presupposition of determinism is absolutely essential for the successful use of a technique. Whether one is applying a technique or recipe to baking a cake or putting a manned orbiter into space, the steps are carefully followed. This clearly is a decision procedure: the decisions were made during the development and refinement of the technique. In its completed form no decisions are made, only the activation of reactions by the steps of the procedure. The mechanistic presupposition of determinism is embodied in a technique.

Does this imply that we would value a rigor-less, a method-less, a totally haphazard style of investigation for psychology and therapeutic practice? Absolutely not! The rigor comes not in following steps in a procedure previously determined in the investigation of material assumed to be mechanistic. The rigor comes from a commitment to be faithful to the meanings expressed in the phenomenon as it is experienced and acted out. The meaningful content ought to get priority in a rigorous psychology. The method ought not to govern the content. The phenomena (the expressed meanings), show themselves in experience and behavior. The psychologist is motivated to faithfully describe those meanings in a rigorous and organized way so that he or she might gain a deeper, broader, and clearer understanding of those phenomena we call the psychological.

The therapist is specifically committed to understanding the client and

not necessarily to explain the client's behavior in the light of some scientific theory. Therapeutic intervention means to intervene: to come between the clients and their inappropriate styles of engaging their world so that these clients might choose to change.

In conclusion, we would want to emphasize that phenomenology is not another psychology theory. Just as therapeutic intervention comes between clients and their habitual modes of acting, so we envision phenomenology as a style of reflection, coming between psychology and its habitual presuppositions.

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